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## A corpus-based genre study of instruction manuals for household appliances

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### Abstract

Whenever we open a household appliance (or any other mechanical or electrical product, such as a toy) we can find a user's manual; this can be a leaflet or an 80-page book. In any case, we agree to name it instruction/user's manual and we treat it as a unit. This communication presents a research done with the purpose of establishing the rhetorical structure of instruction manuals for household appliances and to contrast the differences in two languages, Spanish and English. With this commitment we have compiled a 52-text bilingual corpus divided into two comparable subcorpora following Sinclair's (1991) and Leech's (1996) ideas on corpus linguistics as well as other scholars.

The theoretical framework for this contrastive study is based on macro-linguistics. We have taken the notion of genre to approach the corpus and considered instruction manuals as one more of them. This macro-linguistic perspective is based on Swales (1993), Halliday and Hasan (1989), Werlich (1983) and Bhatia's (1993, 2004) notions. Then, as the communicative process (Shannon, 1948) and the pragmatic relations are similar in every case, we have been able to perform a rhetoric analysis from a twofold perspective: qualitative and quantitative.

On the qualitative side of the analysis, we have determined the prototypical structure, following and adapting Swales model (1993) to the instructional genre, and according to it we have tagged the corpus into moves, steps and sub-steps. On the quantitative side of the analysis, we have looked for the significance of the different moves, steps and sub-steps in numerical terms and percentages. This raw information needs interpretation, and the conclusion will extract it from the differences and similarities in terms of priorities in one language and the other.

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**Keywords:** corpus linguistics; genre studies; instructionsl genre; contrastive analysis

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## 1. Introduction

Whenever we open the box of a household appliance (or any other mechanical or electrical product such as a toy) we can find a user's manual; this can be a leaflet or an 80-page book. In any case we agree to name it, in both cases, instruction/user's manual and we treat it as a unit. The aim of this communication is to present a corpus-based study centred on household appliances instruction manuals as a genre. For this purpose we will review the theoretical framework and the bibliography on which it is based, as well as the methodology used for this study. Then, an analysis of the rhetoric structure from two different perspectives will be exposed, i.e. a qualitative and a quantitative perspective and the results obtained in both cases.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on two main pillars, contrastive studies and genre rhetoric. The aim of any contrastive study is to look for similarities and differences. In the case of two languages this can be done with the purpose of transferring ideas from one language to the other.

This contrast can be approached from two different perspectives, micro and macro-linguistically. A micro-linguistic comparison is centered on small units as the word or the sentence. But if we move to extended units, then we are dealing with a macro-linguistic analysis (Swales, 1993; Halliday and Hasan, 1989), as it is the case in this study.

This research establishes the structure of household appliances instruction manuals as a genre in itself and will also set similarities and differences in this structure in two languages, English and Spanish. The empirical data for an study of these characteristics will be provided by corpus linguistics that will be developed later on.

Every user's manual has in common its instructional function. The manufacturer or an expert, teaches us on how to use properly the appliance we have just bought. The context in which this communication process takes place is similar in every case, and this is why they can be treated as a genre. For Swales (1993: 9), when several texts belong to the same genre, they have the same function and they are similar in its structure, so this makes them recognizable. Bhatia defines genre as 'recognizable communicative events characterized by a set of members of the professional or academic community in which they regularly occur' (2004: 23).

Therefore, a top-down point of view is taken (Werlich, 1983) as a point of departure, and not smaller units as previous traditional grammars. Halliday and Hasan (1989) propose a model in which there is no *grammar* on the one hand and *semantics* on the other, but they identify the role of different linguistic patterns in terms of their function to create meaning. This means that we can study a text based on a linguistic pattern, and based on the repetition of such pattern, we can speak about the construction of a genre (1989: ix).

The way a text of a particular genre is written depends on the communicative purpose that we want to give it. Linguistic analyst plays the role of a detective in order to reveal the mysteries of a genre and to discover its true nature (Bhatia, 1993: xiii), but the aim of these studies is understanding the structure and function of the uses of the language to communicate a meaning (1993: 3).

For this study, we have chosen appliances instruction manuals and we are going to deconstruct a corpus of this kind of texts to see how they are built and hence, to establish the structure of the Instructional Genre.

### 3. Methodology: corpus linguistics and the corpus for this investigation

Corpus linguistics is used as a tool for this comparison of the Spanish and English main structure of household appliances instruction manuals. A corpus is ‘a collection of naturally occurring language text, chosen to characterize a state or variety of a language’ (Sinclair, 1991: 4) as well as ‘a sufficiently large body of naturally occurring data of the language to be investigated’ (Leech, 1996: 8). For this research we have worked with a corpus of 26 instruction manuals in English and 26 in Spanish that were sold at the time of collecting them.

Whether the texts were original or translations was unknown at the time of compiling, they have been treated as originals as they had a good language quality. It is a *bilingual* (English-Spanish) *comparable corpus* (Sinclair, 1996; Torruella and Llisterri, 1999; Altenberg and Granger, 2002; Baker, 1995). After collecting the corpus, the different texts were analyzed and rhetorically tagged but not in the sense of an aligned corpus. For this purpose we have used the ACTRES *tagger* (Contrastive Analysis and Translation English-Spanish in its Spanish acronym). Once this step has been completed, pieces of texts with the same tag can be compared using the ACTRES *browser*. This is very useful when doing a micro-linguistic analysis because it provides not only examples but also results and conclusions.

### 4. Macro-textual description: rhetoric structure

If we analyze the communicative process (Shannon, 1948: 2) the sender of the message is the author of the manual, the inventor or a person with a technical qualification who knows how the appliance works and explains it. We can call it generically the *manufacturer*. The receiver of the message is the *user* of the appliance, and the channel is written in every case.

Paying attention to pragmatic relations, it can be highlighted a superior position from the part of the manufacturer but this is partially eroded because of the condition as a client of the user. Thus, as the manufacturer may be on a superior stage at the beginning, this is relaxed and the user/client is raised at the same level.

(1.) Le agradecemos que haya elegido un aparato de la gama Moulinex, diseñado exclusivamente para la elaboración de yogures. [019IGWS\_\_111022TechES]

(2.) Thank you for buying a Tefal kettle. [015IGWS\_\_111019TechEN]

Regarding the position of the user there are two attitudes towards it: on the one hand, we have the inexperienced user who is going to follow the instructions step by step. And on the other hand, we have the expert user who needs the manual just for reference. The manufacturer has to satisfy both of them.

#### 4.1. Qualitative analysis

To make an analysis of the macro-structure of instruction manuals we have followed the Swales model (1993: 140-41) CARS (*create a research space*) although referred to research articles, it has been applied to our corpus.

Here it is presented the division of the genre into moves, steps and sub-steps together with a prototypical example, note that they do not belong to the same text:

Instructional Genre

MOVE 1: <IDENTIFICATION>

Step 1. <manufacturing company>

Miele

Step 2. <name>

Microwave oven

Step 3. <model>  
 Breville toaster PT46  
 Step 4. <artwork>



Fig. 1. toaster

Step 5. <elements>  
 sensor  
 Step 6. <purpose>  
 Sensor for confirming the selection of a programme

MOVE 2: <PRAISE>

Step 1. <self praise>  
 Your new airfryer allows you to prepare your favourite ingredients and snacks in a healthier way.  
 Step 2. <gratitude>  
 Congratulations on your purchase of a Siemens VSZ6 vacuum cleaner.

MOVE 3: <OBJECTIVE DESCRIPTION>

Step 1. <specifications>  
 Width: 1 850 mm  
 Step 2. <reference>  
 See Cleaning and Storing, pages 19-20.

MOVE 4: <FUNCTIONS>

Step 1. <installing>  
 Sub-step 1. <installing stage>  
 Remove all packaging, stickers or other accessories from the inside and outside of the kettle.  
 Step 2. <operating>  
 Sub-step 1. <operating stage>  
 Turn the speed selector to position 2 to start the appliance.

MOVE 5: <ADVICE>

Step 1. <(extra) tips>  
 We recommend using the universal tray with the rack on top.  
 Step 2. <recipes>  
 toscana bread, ingredients: [...]  
 Step 3. <timing>  
 Chips Maximum quantity 2L 190°C 1000 g 14-16 min.  
 Step 4. <dos>  
 Keep children away from the machine at all times.  
 Step 5. <don'ts>  
 Never immerse the machine in water.

## Step 6. &lt;maintenance&gt;

## Sub-step 1. &lt;maintenance stage&gt;

Clean the motor unit with a damp cloth.

## Step 7. &lt;troubleshooting&gt;

## Sub-step 1. &lt;problem / solution&gt;

If you have difficulty removing bread from the Bread Pan, slide a flat rubber or plastic spatula along the sides of the pan to loosen the loaf.

## Sub-step 2. &lt;guarantee&gt;

The manufacturer does not accept responsibility for any damage or injury caused by improper or incorrect use, or for repairs carried out by unauthorised personnel.

## Sub-step 3. &lt;consumers' service&gt;

HELPLINE: If you have any product problems or queries, please contact our Customer Relations Team first for expert help and advice.

## Step 8. &lt;legislation&gt;

## Sub-step 1. &lt;safety&gt;

The wire which is coloured blue must be connected to the terminal which is marked with the letter N or coloured black.

## Sub-step 2. &lt;recycling&gt;

Dispose of it at your local waste disposal centre.

#### 4.2. Quantitative analysis

With the help of the ACTRES *browser*, statistics have been extracted to find out which moves, steps or sub-steps have more or less quantitative significance and extract conclusions.

Table 1 shows each move, step and sub-step in the corpus and the percentage that it represents.

Table 1. Moves, steps, sub-steps of the Spanish and English texts and their percentage

		Spanish		English	
		Number of texts	Percentage	Number of texts	Percentage
Move 1	Identification	26	100%	26	100%
Step 1	<b>Manufacturing company</b>	<b>25</b>	96,15%	<b>20</b>	76,92%
Step 2	<b>Name</b>	<b>14</b>	53,85%	<b>11</b>	42,31%
Step 3	Model	17	65,38%	15	57,69%
Step 4	Artwork	26	100%	26	100%
Step 5	Elements	25	96,15%	23	88,46%
Step 6	Purpose	11	42,31%	12	46,15%
Move 2	Praise	11	42,31%	11	42,31%
Step 1	Self praise	6	23,08%	7	26,92%
Step 2	Gratitude	6	23,08%	6	23,08%
Move 3	<b>Objective description</b>	<b>18</b>	63,23%	<b>23</b>	88,46%
Step 1	<b>Specifications</b>	<b>11</b>	42,31%	<b>14</b>	53,85%

Step 2	<b>Reference</b>	<b>15</b>	57,69%	<b>18</b>	63,23%
Move 4	Functions	26	100%	26	100%
Step 1	Installing	16	61,54%	18	63,23%
Sub-step 1	Installing stage	13	50%	15	57,69%
Step 2	Operating	26	100%	26	100%
Sub-step 1	Operating stage	24	92,31%	23	88,46%
Move 5	Advice	26	100%	26	100%
Step 1	Extra tips	21	80,77%	19	73,08%
Step 2	<b>Recipes</b>	<b>7</b>	26,92%	<b>4</b>	15,38%
Step 3	Timing	9	34,62%	7	26,92%
Step 4	Do's	25	96,15%	26	100%
Step 5	Don'ts	25	96,15%	25	96,15%
Step 6	Maintenance	23	88,46%	24	92,31%
Sub-step 1	Maintenance stage	18	63,23%	20	76,92%
Step 7	Troubleshooting	25	96,15%	26	100%
Sub-step 1	Problem / solution	17	65,38%	17	65,38%
Sub-step 2	Guarantee	22	84,62%	24	92,31%
Sub-step 3	Consumers' service	21	80,77%	23	88,46%
Step 8	<b>Legislation</b>	<b>20</b>	76,92%	<b>24</b>	92,31%
Sub-step 1	<b>Safety</b>	<b>17</b>	65,38%	<b>21</b>	80,77%
Sub-step 2	Recycling	16	61,54%	16	61,54%

There are no major differences between languages in the same move, step or sub-step. The two main differences in both languages are those referring to *objective description* and *legislation / safety*. It can be interpreted as English texts being more detailed in their descriptions and paying more attention to safety, these are texts that have great concern with legal actions.

The difference in *manufacturing company* is not significant as most texts come from the internet and sometimes they do not include the cover, where these data usually appear. The difference that can be seen in *recipes*, is due to the kind of appliance. The Spanish subcorpus included more appliances for cooking than the English one.

As it has been established in the ACTRES group the priority of including a move, step or sub-step in the prototypical structure of a genre is the following:

Table 2. Priority of frequency

Frequency	Priority
> 80%	obligatory
79% - 60%	high
59% - 40%	medium
39% - 20%	low
< 20%	not to be considered

Table 3. Frequency of steps in move 1 and its priority

		Spanish		English	
Move 1	Identification	100%	obligatory	100%	obligatory
Step 1	Manufacturing company	96,15%	obligatory	76,92%	high
Step 2	Name	53,85%	medium	42,31%	medium
Step 3	Model	65,38%	high	57,69%	medium
Step 4	Artwork	100%	obligatory	100%	obligatory
Step 5	Elements	96,15%	obligatory	88,46%	obligatory
Step 6	Purpose	42,31%	medium	46,15%	medium

Move 1 (table 3) is obligatory, but not its different steps. In fact, the only obligatory steps in both languages are *artwork* and *elements* and both of them are closely related.

Table 4. Frequency of steps in move 2 and its priority

		Spanish		English	
Move 2	Praise	42,31%	medium	42,31%	medium
Step 1	Self praise	23,08%	low	26,92%	low
Step 2	Gratitude	23,08%	low	23,08%	low

It can be observed that the priority in move 2 (table 4) is medium, although this priority goes down to low in both steps. This is the movement with the lowest priority of all of them. If we try to think of a reason, we may consider its function being not only instructional but also promotional, this move is very much related to advertisement and the role of the reader as client. This could be considered a case of mixed genre.

Table 5. Frequency of steps in move 3 and its priority

		Spanish		English	
Move 3	Objective description	63,23%	high	88,46%	obligatory
Step 1	Specifications	42,31%	medium	53,85%	medium
Step 2	Reference	57,69%	medium	63,23%	high

The priority in move 3 (table 5) varies between high in Spanish and obligatory in English, as well as in step 2 in which the priority is also higher in the English subcorpus. It shall be interpreted as the English subcorpus being more concerned with data accuracy.

Table 6. Frequency of steps and sub-steps in move 4 and its priority

		Spanish		English	
Move 4	Functions	100%	obligatory	100%	obligatory
Step 1	Installing	61,54%	high	63,23%	high
Sub-step 1	Installing stage	50%	medium	57,69%	medium

Step 2	Operating	100%	obligatory	100%	obligatory
Sub-step 1	Operating stage	92,31%	obligatory	88,46%	obligatory

Move 4 (table 6) is the center of the instruction and percentages are very similar in both sub-corpora. Step 1 and its sub-step are not obligatory because not in every case an instruction on how to install an appliance is needed, even though the priority varies between high and medium. Step 2 and its sub-step are essential.

Table 7. Frequency of steps and sub-steps in move 5 and its priority

		Spanish		English	
Move 5	Advice	100%	obligatory	100%	obligatory
Step 1	Extra tips	80,77%	obligatory	73,08%	high
Step 2	Recipes	26,92%	low	15,38%	low
Step 3	Timing	34,62%	low	26,92%	low
Step 4	Do's	96,15%	obligatory	100%	obligatory
Step 5	Don'ts	96,15%	obligatory	96,15%	obligatory
Step 6	Maintenance	88,46%	obligatory	92,31%	obligatory
Sub-step 1	Maintenance stage	63,23%	high	76,92%	high
Step 7	Troubleshooting	96,15%	obligatory	100%	obligatory
Sub-step 1	Problem / solution	65,38%	high	65,38%	high
Sub-step 2	Guarantee	84,62%	obligatory	92,31%	obligatory
Sub-step 3	Consumers' service	80,77%	obligatory	88,46%	obligatory
Step 8	Legislation	76,92%	high	92,31%	obligatory
Sub-step 1	Safety	65,38%	high	80,77%	obligatory
Sub-step 2	Recycling	61,54%	high	61,54%	high

Move 5 (table 7) is compulsory, but the priority in the different steps is irregular and varies from one side to the other. It can be stressed for its low priority, those regarding recipes and timing, both are very much inter-related and they are only present in those appliances meant for cooking. As this corpus contains appliances with very different functions, these steps get very blurred. Apart from this, the rest of the steps vary from obligatory to high priority.

## 5. Conclusion

It has been shown that contrastive studies and genre rhetoric can be combined to accomplish a linguistic study on home appliances instruction manuals. Together with corpus linguistics as a tool for an empirical study of these characteristics it has been determined the general structure of a specific genre such as this, and it has also been established which parts are prototypical and which ones are not. It has finally been concluded that there are no major differences between the two languages except for the fact the English texts are more detailed than the Spanish ones regarding *objective description* and *legislation*. The natural path of this analysis would lead us to an analysis on the micro-structure of each part to find the prototypical language of the genre. But this will be the subject of another study.

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